



SUPPORTING THE HEALTH AND
WELLBEING OF THE ARMED
FORCES COMMUNITY AND
CIVILIAN FAMILIES IN
CORNWALL



Making the most of life as the Covid-19 restrictions are eased.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions have been gradually eased over the last couple of months but are still having an impact on everyone's daily lives. As we all experience the 'new normal' and its associated uncertainties it is important that we do whatever we can to maintain/enhance our physical and psychological resilience.

Everyone should be keeping up to date with the latest government/NHS guidance and by doing this, we are helping to protect yourself, your family, the NHS and your community.

During this time, you may be bored, frustrated or lonely. You may also feel low, worried, anxious, or be concerned about your health or that of those close to you. These are all common reactions to the difficult situation we are living through. Everyone reacts differently to events and changes in the way that we think, feel, and behave vary between different people and over time. It is important that you take care of your mind as well as your body.

Most people will find strategies that work for them and the difficult feelings associated with the outbreak will pass in time as our lives become more normal.

What can help your mental health and wellbeing?

Think about your new daily routine. Life is changing for us all for a while and you will have experienced some disruption to your normal routine. Think about how you can adapt and create positive new routines – try to engage in useful activities (such as cleaning, cooking or exercise) or meaningful activities (such as reading or being in touch with friends). You might find it helpful to write a plan for your day or week.

Consider how to stay connected with others. Maintaining relationships with people you trust is important for your psychological wellbeing. We can now meet outdoors providing we follow the latest distancing advice, and this makes things much easier. You can still stay in touch with friends and family via telephone, video calls or social media as you probably did during lockdown however our brains are 'social' and work for us the best in the physical presence of other people.

Help and support others. Think about how you can continue to help those around you – it could make a big difference to them and can make you feel better too. It is important to listen to and accept other people's concerns, worries or behaviours. You may wish to do this alone, with friends or as a member of an organised community group.

Talk about your worries. It is quite common to feel worried, scared, or helpless about the current situation. Remember that this is a difficult time for everyone and sharing with family and friends how you are feeling and the things you are doing to cope can help them too. If you don't feel able to do that, there are people you can speak to via NHS recommended helplines.

Look after your physical wellbeing. Your physical health has a big impact on how you are feeling emotionally and psychologically. At times like these, it can be easy to fall into unhealthy patterns of behaviour which, in turn, can make you feel worse. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals and drink enough water.

Take as much exercise as you can. This can be at home and/or outside. If you can't exercise outside, you can find free, easy 10-minute workouts from Public Health England (PHE) or other exercise videos to try at home on the NHS Fitness Studio. Sport England also has good tips for keeping active at home. Most exercises do not require any specialist equipment and are easy to do at home.

If you can, go outside, there are lots of easy ways to get moving like walking, cycling, or gardening. As restrictions are eased further, it will be easier to exercise outside with friends and in groups. Guidance in this area is changing rapidly so you will need to stay up to date. In time, many team sports will also become accessible.

Seek advice and support if you smoke or use drugs or alcohol. Smoking or using drugs or alcohol to cope in times of stress and disruption can make things worse, including your mental health. 'NHS Smokefree' provides information and advice on quitting smoking and 'One You' has resources to help with cutting back on alcohol. You can also call 'Drinkline' for free on 0300 123 1110 for advice and support and 'Down Your Drink' provides interactive web-based support to help people to drink more safely. If you are concerned about drugs use, 'FRANK' offers information and advice, including where to get help, and has a free advice line – 0300 123 6600.

Look after your sleep. Feeling anxious or worried can make it harder to get a good night's sleep. Good-quality sleep makes a big difference to how you feel mentally and physically, so it's important to get enough.

Try to maintain regular sleeping patterns and keep good sleep hygiene practices, including avoiding screens before bed, cutting back on caffeine and creating a restful environment. The 'Every Mind Matters' sleep page provides practical advice on how to improve your sleep.

Try to manage difficult feelings. Many people find the news about COVID-19 and the news generally to be concerning, however, some people may experience such intense anxiety that it becomes a problem. Try to focus on the things you can control, such as managing your media and information intake – 24-hour news and constant social media updates can make you more worried. If it is affecting you, try to limit the time you spend watching, reading, or listening to media coverage of the outbreak. It may help to only check the news at set times or limiting yourself to checking a couple of times a day.

It is okay to acknowledge some things that are outside of your control right now. The Every Mind Matters page on 'anxiety' and 'NHS mental wellbeing audio guides' provide further information on how to manage anxiety.

Get the facts. Gather high-quality information that will help you to accurately determine your own or other people's risk of contracting COVID-19 so that you can take reasonable precautions. Find a credible source you can trust such as GOV.UK, or the NHS website, and fact-check information you get from newsfeeds, social media or other people.

Think about how inaccurate information could affect others too. Try not to share information without fact-checking with credible sources.

Do things you enjoy. When you are anxious, lonely, or low, you may do things that you usually enjoy less often or not at all. Focusing on your favourite hobby, learning something new or simply taking time to relax indoors or outdoors should give you some relief from anxious thoughts and feelings and can boost your mood.

If you can't do the things you normally enjoy because you are staying at home more, try to think about how you could adapt them, or try something new. There are lots of free tutorials and courses online and people are coming up with innovative online solutions, such as online pub quizzes and streamed live music concerts.

Set goals. Setting goals and achieving them gives a sense of control and purpose. Think about things you want or need to do that you can still do at home, such as watching a film, reading a book, or learning something new online.

Keep your mind active. This can help you feel in control and less low or worried. Read, write, play games, do crossword puzzles, sudokus, jigsaws or drawing and painting, whatever works best for you.

Take time to relax and focus on the present. This can help with difficult emotions, worries about the future, and generally make you feel better. Relaxation techniques can also help some people to deal with feelings of anxiety. For useful resources, see 'Every Mind Matters' and the 'NHS mindfulness' page.

If you can, get outside but if you can't, bring nature in. Spending time in green spaces can benefit both your psychological and physical wellbeing. You can spend time outside for recreation or travel to outdoor publicly accessible open spaces, irrespective of distance. You can also sit and rest or sunbathe outside if you want to. If you can't go outside, you can try to still get these positive effects by spending time with the windows open to let in fresh air, arranging space to sit and see a nice view (if possible) and get some natural sunlight, or get out into the garden if you can.

Challenges you may be facing

You may be experiencing challenges in your life now that are affecting your mental health. The following advice may help you to think about potential challenges you may encounter and plan for them. Making these plans could help to protect or improve your mental health during these challenging times.

Financial concerns. you may be worried about work and money – these issues can have a big impact on your mental health. For guidance on what your rights are at work, what benefits you are entitled to and what further support is available, see the '.GOV' website guidance for work and support during Covid-19' or get advice from 'Citizens Advice' or the 'National Debtline'.

If you care for other people. you may be worried about how to ensure care for those who rely on you – either your dependants at home or others that you regularly visit. Let your local authority know if you provide care, or support someone you don't live with. Further advice on creating a contingency plan and sources of support are available from 'Carers UK'.

Most important of all, remain optimistic because things will improve over time!



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